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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres, Soroptimist International and Zonta International (general) non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; the International Council of Jewish Women, the International Council of Psychologists, the International Federation of Social Workers, the International Federation of University Women, the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Perhaps Kids Meeting Kids Can Make a Difference, School Sisters of Notre Dame; the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Council; and the Armenian Relief Society, the Association for Childhood Education International and the International Women's Anthropology Conference, non-governmental organizations on the Roster of the Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION
A FOCUS THEME FOR FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOCIAL SUMMIT

As advocates for children's rights, Non-Governmental Organizations welcomed the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) and embraced its Programme of Action in which participating States commit themselves to promote and attain universal and equitable access to quality education to help eradicate poverty, promote employment and foster social integration, with a particular emphasis on girls' education. But later, when the goals of the Summit were not supported by concrete agreements within countries, among countries and intergovernmental and international institutions, the goals became more a series of unfulfilled ideals.

However, the WSSD created a momentum within the international community to reflect on and mobilize political will for social development. The occasion of the Summit follow-up lends itself to translate these ideals into concrete actions and goals. They should include re-consideration of national priorities, especially where the proportion of the national budget allocated to defense far exceeds that allocated for health and education taken together (1999 UNICEF Report). They should also include new and concrete forms of international cooperation, especially those related to the relief or cancellation of the external debt of poor countries.

At the same time the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) depends greatly on the implementation of the overall goals of the WSSD. However, worrisome trends that globalization brings, especially to vulnerable populations (ever more excluded from human development and access to technology and information), call for a more strategic focus on the Summit's implementation.

Education: A Key Goal

Among the positive outcomes of the WSSD was the reaffirmed consensus that education is a key goal for social development, in accordance with long standing UN goals, principles and international treaties. At the Summit, education was conceptualized not only as a basic human right but also as an essential element for a nation's development. Education's link to all aspects of human life makes it indispensable to enable an environment for poverty eradication, expansion of productive employment and social integration, and respect for and protection of human rights.

In the WSSD Programme of Action, the goal of universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015 confronts UNICEF data for 1999 that there are "about 130 million primary school age children in developing countries who do not attend school." Therefore, this goal becomes even more essential.

The 1999 UNICEF report also indicates that in the least developed countries, "approximately 73 million of the 130 million out-of-school children" are girls. This indicates that to close the gender gap by 2005 these countries will need special assistance. Attaining quality education seems even more difficult to achieve, given many countries' critical economic conditions. The debt crisis has to be addressed ethically and realistically. The Social Summit goals are unattainable if poor national economies have to dedicate one third or more of their budgetary resources to their external debt service.

Basic Agreements on Education:

In the design and implementation of new projects and programs for education, the Convention on the Rights of the Child must be the guiding framework, with special attention to the following basic principles:

- Education adhering to the principles of the United Nations and preparing children for development, and a culture of human rights and peace.
- Quality education that maintains training of teachers and adequate material resources, and provides life skills, improves health and nutrition and builds self-esteem.
- Elimination of gender and social inequalities, with affirmative action for the education of girls, children with disabilities, indigenous children, working and displaced children.
- Budgetary priority for obligatory primary education.
- The inclusion of pre-school in free primary education as an option for families.

National Political Framework on Education:

New international agreements on education may include the implementation of national educational systems to ensure the above basic principles, foster social integration and eliminate social stratification through a political framework that:

- Makes governments responsible and accountable for primary, public, free and universal education.
- Subsidizes poor communities (from federal or state resources) to achieve a standard of high quality education for all.
- Takes into consideration the special needs of vulnerable groups, including migrant, refugee and internally displaced children.
- Considers advances and good practices in the formulation of their programs on education.

INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION

If the goal of education for all is to be achieved, additional financial resources are indispensable. We see the following as possible:

Debt cancellation in exchange for education:
The poor did not contract the external debt but de facto pay the consequences of their countries' indebtedness. While the cancellation or alleviation of these debts are crucial for social evelopment, there is no guarantee that such measures will automatically bring new resources to eradicate poverty and to attain the basic needs of national populations. Therefore, accords must be made to include specific percentages of canceled debt to be invested in education.

Support for Education from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.
The appeal to these two financial institutions to rethink their policies in relation to national economies has to take into consideration that the peace and well-being of nations crucially depends on the eradication of poverty and its many expressions. Positive macro-economic indicators do not express people's well-being. Their social needs have to be introduced in the WB and IMF assessments of a country. It is necessary for the Bretton

Woods institutions to be key partners in the implementations of the Social Summit goals on education. Assistance to developing countries should always include grants for education.

20/20 Initiative:
An evaluation of the implementation of the 20/20 initiative in relation to the Social Summit goals should inform new bilateral agreements between developed and developing countries investing in specific areas of education.

Official Development Assistance (ODA):
ODA should largely be directed to social development. Agreements on concrete percentages of all ODA for education and other basic services are indispensable. Developed countries that have not reached the 0.07 point agreement are in the best position to fulfill their commitment with new funds for education.

Social Corporate Responsibilities:
Companies operating in poor countries bear a special responsibility for their host countries' citizens. Commercial and financial enterprises are showing signs of supporting partnerships with public and private entities to implement social programs. Concrete educational projects can be readily financed by corporations in collaboration with governments and civil society.

Good Governance Practices:
Accountability and transparency are prerequisites for good governance and should be expressed not only in agreements but also in the program designs and evaluations. Good governance will shift substantial resources to basic social services. Agreements on international cooperation for social development must include assistance to improve governance practices.

Reallocation of Military Budgets:
The old appeal to reallocate military budgets to basic human needs, reaffirmed at the Social Summit, is still an issue that needs to be brought back in relation to shift resources to social development. Some re-allocations can be easily accomplished by the military performing social services, i.e. building schools. Military budgets higher than the budgets for health and education combined do not have ethical justification.

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Statement submitted by Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The potential contribution of debt cancellation to poverty eradication goals: further implementation of the Social Summit commitments

As religious institutions, development agencies and non-governmental organizations with extensive experience in impoverished countries and a deep commitment to the eradication of poverty, we have followed closely the implementation of decisions made at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen. We affirm wholeheartedly the Summit's commitment to "eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind" (commitment 2). As participants in the Jubilee 2000 campaign, we are acutely aware of the devastating impact of debt and have vigorously supported efforts to alleviate "onerous debt and debt service burdens" (actions A, para. 10 (a)), without conditions that exacerbate poverty or environmental destruction.

Since the Social Summit there has been much debate about the depth and framework for debt relief. Spurred by Jubilee 2000 and others, creditors have finally acknowledged the seriousness of the debt crisis and have agreed to participate in a comprehensive programme (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative) to make debt payments sustainable for impoverished countries. In 1999 at Cologne, Germany, and in subsequent meetings, bilateral and multilateral creditors substantially revised the HIPC Initiative towards a goal of poverty reduction. The basis of this new framework for debt reduction (HIPC-II) will be the poverty reduction strategy paper.

It is of critical import that United Nations agencies (such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization etc.) with extensive experience in poverty

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reduction actively support the development of the poverty reduction strategy paper in poor countries. Particular attention should be given to transparency and to the meaningful participation of local communities in shaping the process surrounding debt relief in a given country: development of the paper; monitoring implementation, and regular assessment of the social and environmental impact of policies and programmes as they are implemented.

Numerous commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development are pertinent to the new Cologne framework. Certain Copenhagen commitments could be supported, at least in some measure, by a well-implemented Cologne framework. Among them are the following:

(a) Formulate or strengthen national policies and strategies geared to substantially reducing overall poverty in the shortest possible time, reducing inequalities and eradicating absolute poverty (commitment 2 (a));

(b) Ensure that people living in poverty have access to productive resources, including credit, land, education and training, technology, knowledge and information, and public services, and participate in decision-making on a policy and regulatory environment that would enable them to benefit from expanding employment and economic opportunities (commitment 2 (c));

(c) Ensure that national budgets and policies are oriented, as necessary, to meeting basic needs, reducing inequalities and targeting poverty (commitment 2 (e));

(d) Strive to ensure that the international community and international organizations, particularly the multilateral financial institutions, assist developing countries and all countries in need in their efforts to achieve our overall goal of eradicating poverty and ensuring basic social programmes (commitment 2 (g)).

The international community has superseded the commitments of the Summit to debt relief (for example, in commitment 7 (c)). In the process, however, it has become evident that even more must be done to cancel additional debts for a greater number of countries.

In many areas, critical differences between Copenhagen and Cologne, or critical challenges, remain to be addressed.

The Copenhagen Declaration repeatedly refers to the eradication of poverty, whereas the Cologne Initiative targets only the reduction of poverty. To contribute substantially to the eradication of poverty, debt cancellation will of necessity be much deeper then currently committed and benefit many more countries.

Little debt cancellation of any substance has yet been accomplished. In fact, any value of the Cologne commitments will be seen in their actualization. International creditors must be held accountable to promises made in the process of this debate.

Structural adjustment programmes have consistently accompanied debt relief, despite well-founded accusations that, as designed and applied, they have exacerbated poverty and environmental destruction. The impact of these policy reforms must be honestly evaluated. No conditions that worsen poverty or environmental destruction can be attached to debt relief. Regularly repeated social and environmental impact assessments must be made throughout the process of economic policy change, including debt cancellation.

United Nations agencies have the expertise and experience to assist with these assessments, to which delegates to Copenhagen made a specific commitment: We commit ourselves to ensuring that when structural adjustment programmes are agreed to, they include social development goals, in particular eradicating poverty, promoting full and productive employment and enhancing social integration (commitment 8). We will review the impact of structural adjustment programmes on social development, including, where appropriate, by means of gender-sensitive social impact assessments (commitment 8 (b)).

An essential step in making debt reduction contribute to poverty eradication is the identification and termination of adjustment programmes that have deepened unemployment, lowered wages and job security, destroyed small businesses, undermined food security, increased the burdens on women, and devastated the environment in many, many countries (see E/CN.4/1999/50).

Given the many points of intersection between the Copenhagen Declaration and the Cologne Initiative and the importance of careful implementation of the latter, we urge more extensive involvement of United Nations agencies in:

(a) The design, implementation and monitoring of process, policy and programmes associated with the cancellation of debt; working with Governments and local communities to ensure that debt cancellation contributes to the reduction of inequality and the eradication of poverty;

(b) Supporting meaningful participation by local communities in decisions about debt relief, including decisions about the design of national poverty reduction strategies. The commitment to participation must go beyond words to real action. It must not be only consultative but must include real participation in decision-making, implementation and evaluation of poverty reduction strategies. Furthermore, substantive resources must be made available to make that participation possible;

(c) Monitoring the process of debt cancellation to ensure that the consideration of the social impact of economic policy reforms is an integral part of decision-making about the appropriateness of any such reforms prior to and during application;

(d) Ensuring that resources freed by debt cancellation be used to benefit impoverished people and their communities through investment in jobs, high quality and affordable food, education, health care and other basics of a dignified life.

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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

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The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The world's poorest citizens struggle every day for survival. In their efforts, they contribute in many ways to furthering the goals set at the World Summit for Social Development and the commitments made there. Through their daily lives, they are partners in the fight on poverty and in the efforts of the United Nations to further social integration and full employment. This is why the International Movement ATD Fourth World, which is a partnership between very poor families and those who work in solidarity with them, made a contribution to the Social Summit in 1995. Despite signs of progress since then, much remains to be done. ATD Fourth World has therefore made a new contribution in preparation of the upcoming General Assembly special session to review the implementation of the outcome of the social summit and to take further initiatives for action. This paper, prepared for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, is the basis for the remarks below.

The issue of partnership with poor families and communities has gained increased attention, as witnessed during the major international conferences and summits held under the auspices of the United Nations in the last decade. The activities of the United Nations reflect the importance accorded by a growing number of people and organizations to the respect of every human being's dignity and rights, in harmony with the dignity of others — in the family, in the community, in the country and in the world. In this sense, the United Nations is progressing towards the embodiment of the credo, "We, the peoples ...".

In this light, partnership with the most destitute — millions of people throughout the world — must be understood within a perspective wider than that of having a say on matters concerning their lives. Full partnership leads to developing a "culture of overcoming extreme poverty," in which the "culture of peace" advocated by the United Nations plays a major role — with a special concern, in the decade to come, for putting the poorest children at the centre of this new culture.

> "We feel as if we don't belong to the real world. What kind of future do we have then? No work, no money, no freedom, nothing we can do. Without a job we can't envisage beginning a family. The young people I know don't want to

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have children because life is too difficult. Those who already have children ask themselves 'If things go on as they are, what kind of life will they have?'"

The young woman quoted above, a member of ATD Fourth World, expresses the alienation felt by so many of our world's poorest citizens. As globalization accelerates in many ways, the United Nations must remind the world that no one should be forgotten. For social development to succeed, we must be wary of striving to highlight success stories that leave some people out. Some individuals can benefit from short-term support to climb their way out of poverty. Others, who need a longer-term investment in their future, do succeed in taking certain steps out of poverty, but these successes can be so small as to go unnoticed by others.

In order to build the indispensable foundation for promoting a culture of peace, harmony and equal rights, as proposed by the United Nations, we need to respect the conditions necessary for building partnership with the poorest so as to empower them. Among these conditions are:

- Investing the time needed to discover the hidden realities of people's lives;
- Basing projects on the aspirations of the poorest, rather than on problems;
- Strengthening the family unit;
- Building on efforts of solidarity that already exist within a community, rather than supplanting them;
- Shaping one's knowledge together with the poorest;
- Making opportunities for the very poor to renew their creativity and contribute to cultural achievements.

Indicators of success in building a human rights based partnership with the poorest should include signs that:

- Very poor people are becoming less isolated from others;
- Their community recognizes what they have to contribute, rather than seeing them as objects of charity;
- The struggles in their past are valued, thus strengthening their ability to overcome hardship;
- They have the tools necessary to speak out in public on issues important to them;
- They have gained the strength needed to stand up for others even worse off than themselves.

Further initiatives

Not every measure can be undertaken at the same time, but public policy should indicate a strong political will to follow the compass towards the comprehensive and forward-looking approach adopted in Copenhagen.

1. Personal commitment

All people should be urged to volunteer their time and talents in the fight against poverty, through activities with governmental and non-governmental agencies, or through sharing their employment. Wherever the poorest have been condemned to feeling useless, economic autonomy must be no less of a priority than creating opportunities where they can meet people from other backgrounds in order to learn from one another and try their hands together at creative activities.

In addition, people from all walks of life should be encouraged to make a full-time commitment for periods of a few months, a year, or a few years, through non-profit organizations dedicated to overcoming poverty. The International Year of Volunteers (2001) should be an opportunity to evaluate and reinforce existing efforts in this field. This could be done in the framework of the United Nations Volunteers Programme, or through initiatives taken by Member States or by the NGO community worldwide.

2. Government leadership

In order to create consensus for a commitment to fighting poverty and to encourage individual involvement on a larger scale, Governments and intergovernmental bodies should give the necessary impetus in ways that take into account local customs and traditions:

- One such way is showing how valued these contributions in fighting poverty are. For instance, universities in Thailand provide training and monitoring to post-graduate students who work in very poor communities. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is

planning to introduce pension credits for those voluntarily providing care to the elderly and disabled. Several programmes in the United States of America reward the voluntary service commitments of young people by offering scholarships for higher education. Other programmes could include support for initiatives that encourage sharing work and cultural enrichment. They could also include support, financial and otherwise, for sabbaticals for all — including the very poor, whether they are working or out of work — to provide possibilities for learning new skills, and enlarging one's cultural and social horizons;

- Leadership is also needed to provide the necessary institutional and financial framework to support individual involvement, perhaps under the auspices of the United Nations. For instance, a recognized status could be created for those who work to eradicate poverty for a minimum of two years.

3. The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

The International Day can be a launching point for these activities. Governments should follow the example of the Philippines which has declared this a national day for people to unite in efforts guided by the very poor themselves. In addition, in the context of the International Year for the Culture of Peace (2000), UNESCO should be entrusted with the mandate of ensuring that the poorest population groups throughout the world have significant input during the celebration of this Year, and to the proposals for follow-up. It is recommended that 17 October 2000 be dedicated to the link between constructing peace and overcoming poverty.

4. Employment policies

Employment policies should be developed together with training policies. They should offer very poor workers opportunities to secure a decent livelihood, as well as to expand their knowledge and skills in areas that prepare them for the modern labour market. If they work part-time, other forms of income for training should supplement income from work.

At the national level, Governments should launch pilot initiatives and/or support existing ones for these objectives. They also should encourage creating businesses that implement, in a sustainable way, the objectives described above. Governments alone cannot shoulder the ambition of ensuring for very poor workers access to decent livelihood and training opportunities for modern work. The business sector, trade unions and civil society must be part of these efforts.

5. Transforming unemployment

The fact that, according to International Labour Organization (ILO) figures from 1994, an additional 43 million people enter the labour market every year — 118,000 persons per day — raises the question of what will happen to those workers during periods of unemployment. The so-called "lifetime job" is disappearing. All workers face transitions between work situations. In this respect, the experiences and the thinking of the poorest workers can give us a fresh perspective on entering the labour market and on the transition between unemployment and employment. For the least-skilled workers in many countries, more often than not, periods of unemployment stretch into times of waiting, of wasting time, of deadened time. The longer such times last, the more severely they impact the possibility of re-entering the labour market. This is why time spent out of work absolutely must be shaped differently. Instead of expending all one's energies for survival, workers should have the security of a decent income to live on. Only with security are all people free to participate in cultural, social, civic, political, trade unionist or other activities. Security is necessary before the poorest can improve their skills in fields of their choice and before they can seek cultural enrichment, thus preparing themselves for participation in completely new areas of activity.

The International Labour Office has concrete data on systems of social protection and on unemployment benefits throughout the world, and provides technical support to countries in the process of installing or modernizing such systems. The ILO thus would be the appropriate agency to explore transforming periods of unemployment into periods of transition towards employment.

6. National policies and strategies for poverty eradication and social development

The Copenhagen Summit emphasized involving people who live in poverty and their organizations in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of these national strategies. As Governments progress in formulating the policies, they should focus sharply on gathering and taking into account the experience and views of their poorest citizens. The United Nations could also survey the expertise of grass-roots actors in civil society in order to furnish technical support for these national policies.

To ensure that the poorest can contribute to elaborating national plans, partnership is essential. At a minimum, Governments should initiate the process by including in their national plans for social development a programme for working with all citizens, including the poorest, to elaborate a more specific plan for overcoming poverty. Some national initiatives for eradicating poverty have in fact been designed through a process of partnership with all concerned, including the very poor themselves. One example is the Law Against Social Exclusion adopted in France in 1998. Another example comes from South Africa, where poverty hearings and other initiatives led to a National Poverty Forum working on the adoption of the National Programme of Action to Eradicate Poverty through implementing commitments made at the Copenhagen Summit. The South African Programme of Action is not limited to government departments; it also includes plans for poverty alleviation and eradication by non-governmental organizations, the business sector and educational and religious institutions.

7. Monitoring human rights-based development

Since Copenhagen, initiatives have been undertaken at the regional and international levels that emphasize the necessity of building schemes against poverty. The statement of commitment for action to eradicate poverty, issued in June 1998 by the executive heads of all United Nations agencies (the Administrative Committee on Coordination), summed up this emphasis well when it reaffirmed that "poverty eradication is a key international commitment and a central objective of the United Nations system".

Procedures to monitor the follow-up of these proposals have been set up, and, in this, the Commission for Social Development plays an active and central role. However, partnership with the poorest in crafting programmes for fighting poverty is not being fully monitored. It is relevant to recall the proposal made in the final report on human rights and extreme poverty (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13) adopted by the Commission on Human Rights. The report outlined that, whereas the Copenhagen Summit foresaw an appropriate machinery for the commitment on employment, i.e. the ILO, no such provision exists for the commitments on social integration and poverty eradication. This report suggested that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights be entrusted with a leading role.

An appropriate United Nations body should be empowered to further the initiatives that will come out of the special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the Copenhagen commitments. This could also facilitate gathering expertise from different grass-roots actors in civil society, to furnish technical support for the national comprehensive policies for eradicating poverty. A specific mandate should be given to the High Commissioner for Human Rights in this framework, given the fundamental link between human rights and overcoming poverty.

8. A Convention for Overcoming Human Poverty

A working group should be set up to study the feasibility of a legally binding convention on overcoming human poverty, crafted in partnership with the people who live in deep poverty and with those committed alongside them. The idea of preparing a legally binding convention on the eradication of poverty has been brought forward by the Director-General of ILO, Juan Somavia, in order to follow through on the political commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development. The convention should not define new rights for specific groups, but rather promote a coherent, dynamic and forward-looking approach recognizing the human dignity of every human being and ensuring that all people are able to exercise their human rights. The world's most disadvantaged citizens, who have shown us that human rights are indivisible, have a key role to play in shaping this convention as a tool to further the creation of national frameworks for an overall and coherent approach towards all human rights, be they civil or political, economic, social or cultural.

Grinding poverty can be found in every country. The convention should therefore address itself to all

nations, regardless of their political, economic, social or cultural situation. The convention should also encourage all countries to share their experience and knowledge as partners in fighting poverty. The experience at the grass-roots levels among individuals and communities should inspire cooperation and solidarity between all nations to achieve the common goal of overcoming human poverty. Countries in particularly difficult situations, if they so desire, should be given access to appropriate support. Among other partners, the very poor must be associated with this work, through non-governmental organizations and the other organizations of civil society that they have chosen to represent them.

When our planet grew more aware of and sensitive to the specific conditions violating the rights of children, the Member States of the United Nations were able to adopt the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination also became tools for broadening access to justice for all. As the international community grows increasingly more sensitive to the situation of the very poorest individuals, families and communities, it deserves a tool worthy of enabling them to exercise all their fundamental rights and to assume their responsibilities.

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The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The Right to Education: focus on the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development

Poverty is the most important moral question facing this age, according to the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development (E/CN.5/1999/3). The assessment of the outcome of the Summit indicates the global extent and depth of poverty five years after the nations of the world discussed and formulated plans to eradicate poverty, create employment and promote social integration.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame, a non-governmental organization associated with the Economic and Social Council and the Department of Public Information of the United Nations, have been involved in education for over 150 years. We have maintained schools and informal educational programmes in 35 countries of our world. Therefore, the focus of this statement is on the human right to education, which is stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We know that commitment 6 of the Copenhagen Summit calls for universal and equitable access to quality education, health care and nutrition. It calls for the eradication of illiteracy. The document states that these services are essential for human development and improvement in the quality of life. It is a widely accepted fact that societies benefit as a whole when education and health care are accessible to all. However, cost-effectiveness seems to continue to be the criterion for choosing the means for delivery of these services.

The State of the World's Children 1999, a publication of the United Nations Children's Fund, tells us that nearly a billion people, two thirds of them women, will enter the twenty-first century unable to read a book or sign their names -- much less operate a computer or understand a simple application form. Without an education, people cannot work productively, care for their health, sustain and protect themselves and their families or live culturally enriched lives. Illiteracy makes it difficult for them to interact in society in a spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance and gender equality among all peoples and groups. Within our society, the denial of education harms the cause of democracy and social development as well as international peace and security.

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In most of the world's religious traditions, each person reflects their God-given dignity and has basic rights and responsibilities that flow from our human nature and belong to us as humans regardless of any social or political structures. These rights begin with the right to life. They include those things that make life truly human, such as the rights to:

- Freedom of conscience; to raise a family;
- Life without discrimination;
- A share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family, including adequate food, clothing, housing, health care, education, employment and a safe environment.

These rights carry corresponding responsibilities — to one another, to our families, to our communities and to society at large — to respect the rights of others and to work for the common good.

At Copenhagen, we also committed ourselves to the universalization of basic education, early childhood education and various means of non-formal education. We promised to ensure that children, particularly girls, enjoy their rights to education, adequate nutrition and health care and, further, promised:

- Adolescents the right to complete schooling;
- To recognize and support the right of indigenous people to an education that is responsive to their needs, aspirations and cultures;
- To develop broad-based education programmes that promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development;
- To promote the values of tolerance, responsibility and respect for the diversity and rights of others and to provide training in peaceful conflict resolution.

Because the School Sisters of Notre Dame have effectively organized and provided teacher training in mountainous and rural areas of developing countries, I would like to encourage local and national governments and United Nations agencies such as UNICEF to initiate and maintain programmes for teacher preparation in the local rural communities, primarily for teachers at the primary level and in basic adult literacy programmes. We also recommend that partnerships be established in local areas among the village leaders, parents, religious groups, non-governmental organizations, and local governments to determine the needs for education, nutrition and health. This same group of partners can then determine ways to satisfy these needs and to determine ways to finance projects, which may mean dealing with government officials at regional or national levels. The more educational programmes that are available to the community the better able its members will be to set goals for themselves and find ways to meet their needs.

Our experience in developing countries points to corruption and civil unrest as the principal obstacles to quality education. In many areas, there is widespread corruption among the local school personnel, administrators and teachers, who confiscate funds and supplies for their own personal use. In many places, there is also abuse of pubescent girls by male teachers. It seems appropriate that national Governments provide mechanisms for the eradication of these abuses of power and authority within their school systems.

The second obstacle mentioned is armed conflicts and civil war. As previously stated, training in conflict resolution is necessary at all levels of education. Resources are needed to:

- Continue educational programmes in refugee camps;
- Set up treatment centres for long term illnesses and disabilities;
- Provide services in situations where normal living conditions have been suspended because of armed conflicts and natural disasters.

Our organization supports the recommendation presented in the above-mentioned report of the Secretary-General that increasing public expenditure on education, health and other social services can be accomplished by reducing low priority outlays such as military spending, as well as through mobilizing additional resources.

International debt is another dangerous obstacle to social services, including education, health and nutrition, forcing the world's most impoverished countries to use scarce resources to pay their debts rather than invest in the well-being of their people. We believe that, just as the debt burden is felt most severely by the poor, so too should debt cancellation benefit the poor. Debt cancellation should free resources for investment in human development and social services.

Our organization endorses the proposals addressed in *The State of the World's Children 1999*. To protect children's right to education, schools and education systems must be gender-sensitive and girl-friendly. Key measures that have proven to promote girls' schooling and that also enhance the quality of the school experience for all children, include:

- Offering a learning experience that is child centred;
- Schooling that is relevant and conducted in the local language;
- Recruiting and training teachers to be more sensitive to gender and to children's rights;
- Locating schools closer to children's homes; ensuring that schools are places of safety with a supply of safe water and latrines; and rooting out gender bias from textbooks and materials.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame will continue to struggle in solidarity with those who are poor for justice and the right to quality education. We committed ourselves in 1997 to continually explore and face the complexity of the economic, social, and political causes of poverty as we work towards the elimination of unjust structures within the global community. In each of the 35 countries where our members live and work, we will continue to exert our efforts to change the political will in order that social services are provided in an inclusive way, that all citizens enjoy the right to participate in decision-making and the right to call providers to account for the quality of service they use and for which they pay. We also expect the Commission for Social Development, the United Nations agencies and national Governments to continue the direction set in the Copenhagen Declaration, to include and to give consideration to the spiritual needs of individuals, families and communities along with materials needs. We encourage you to reverence and to respect the religious diversity that exists within communities. Allow your recognition of this diversity to be reflected in the decisions you make for the delivery of all social services, but especially for education.